

Terrapin



Saving the Gulmohur

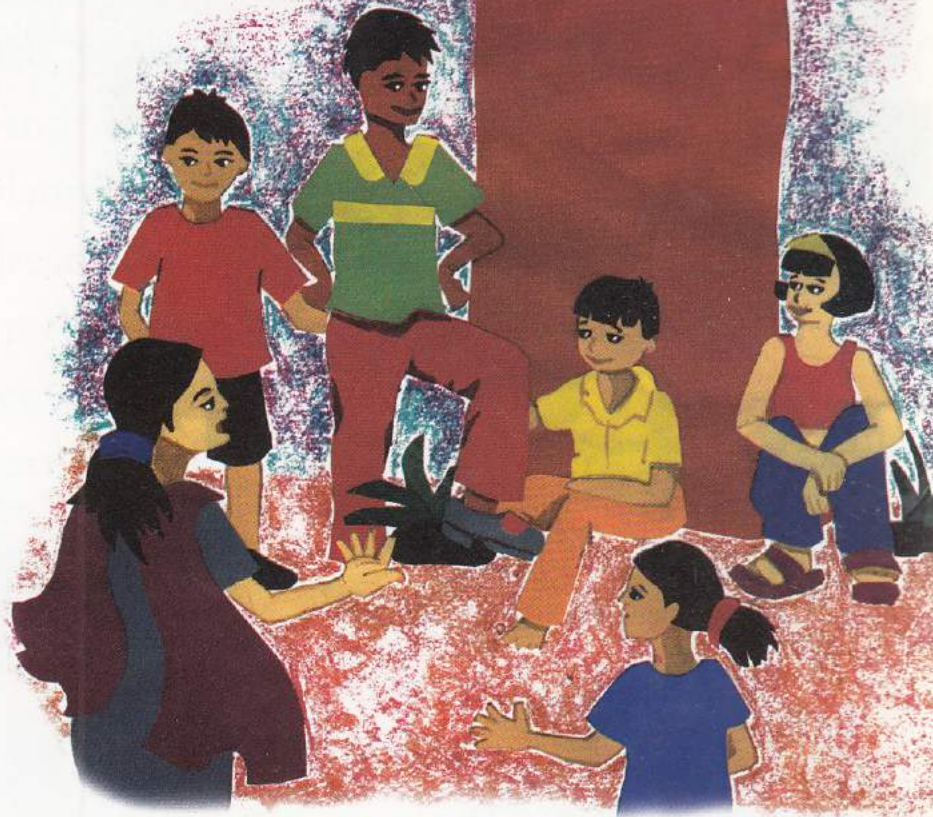
Level 2



This book belongs to




Saving the Gulmohur



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Zara was always the first to reach the tree house, up in the old Gulmohur tree. She would come home from school, shower quickly, phone her mum at work to say hello, grab a snack, some water, her books and her Walkman and dash to the tree. She and her four friends – Arnab, Simran, Yusuf and Aman – spent most of their time in the tree house. They did their homework, planned their outings, played and argued, relaxed and dreamed their dreams... Zara loved clambering up the rickety stairway, finding the key in its hiding place and snuggling into her special corner where the afternoon sun left a warm glow.



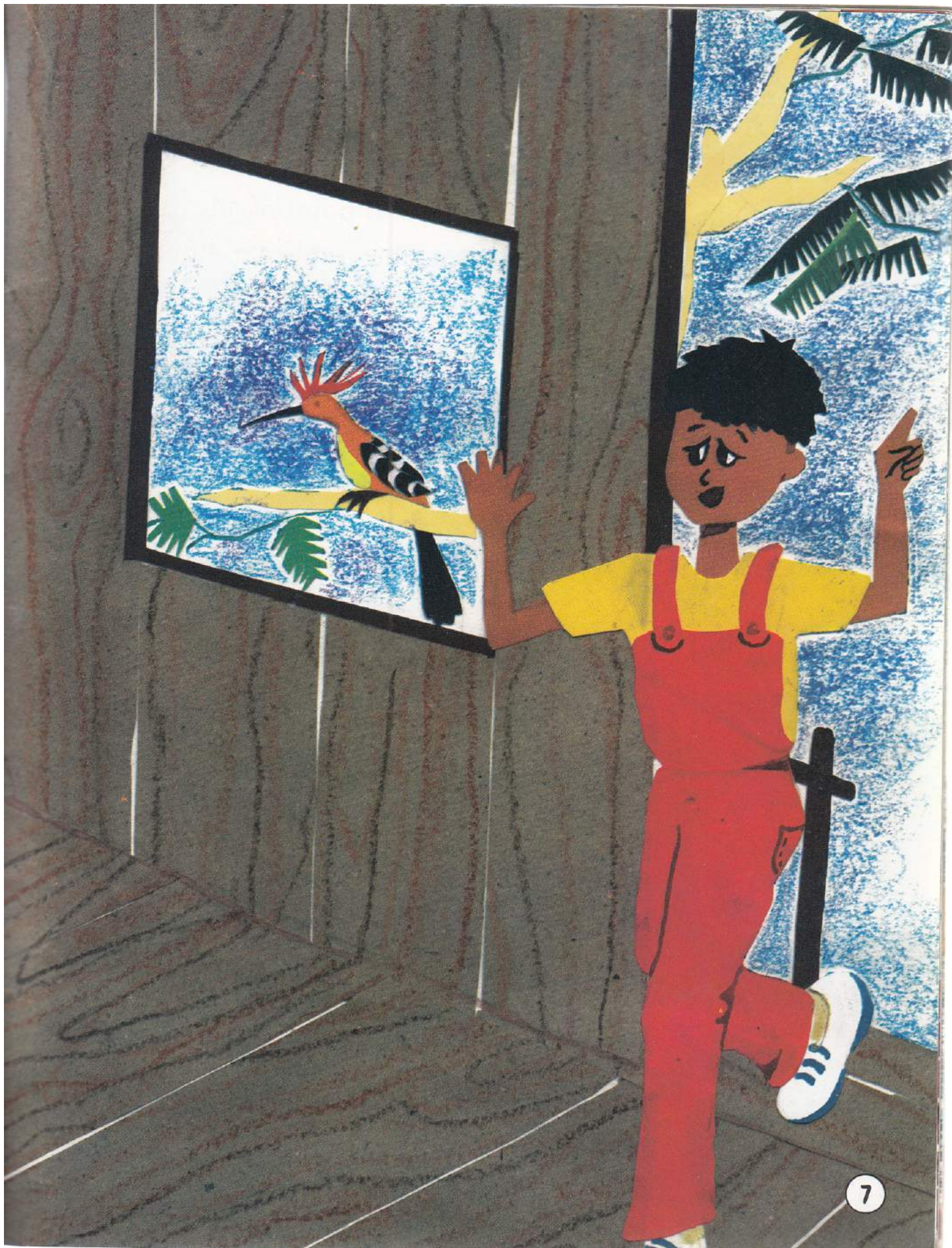


The tree house was Zara and Arnab's idea but Simran, Yusuf and Aman also helped in setting it up. Aman's dad, an architect, made a rough drawing and arranged for the carpenters to build it. Simran furnished it with rugs, cushions and some basic furniture like stools and small shelves. The walls had drawings and an old message board, which the five friends used most effectively. The place had a lovely, adventurous air. The Gulmohur tree was in an abandoned plot of land near Zara's backyard. As Zara waited for her friends, she remembered how tough it was convincing all five sets of parents to allow them to build the tree house!

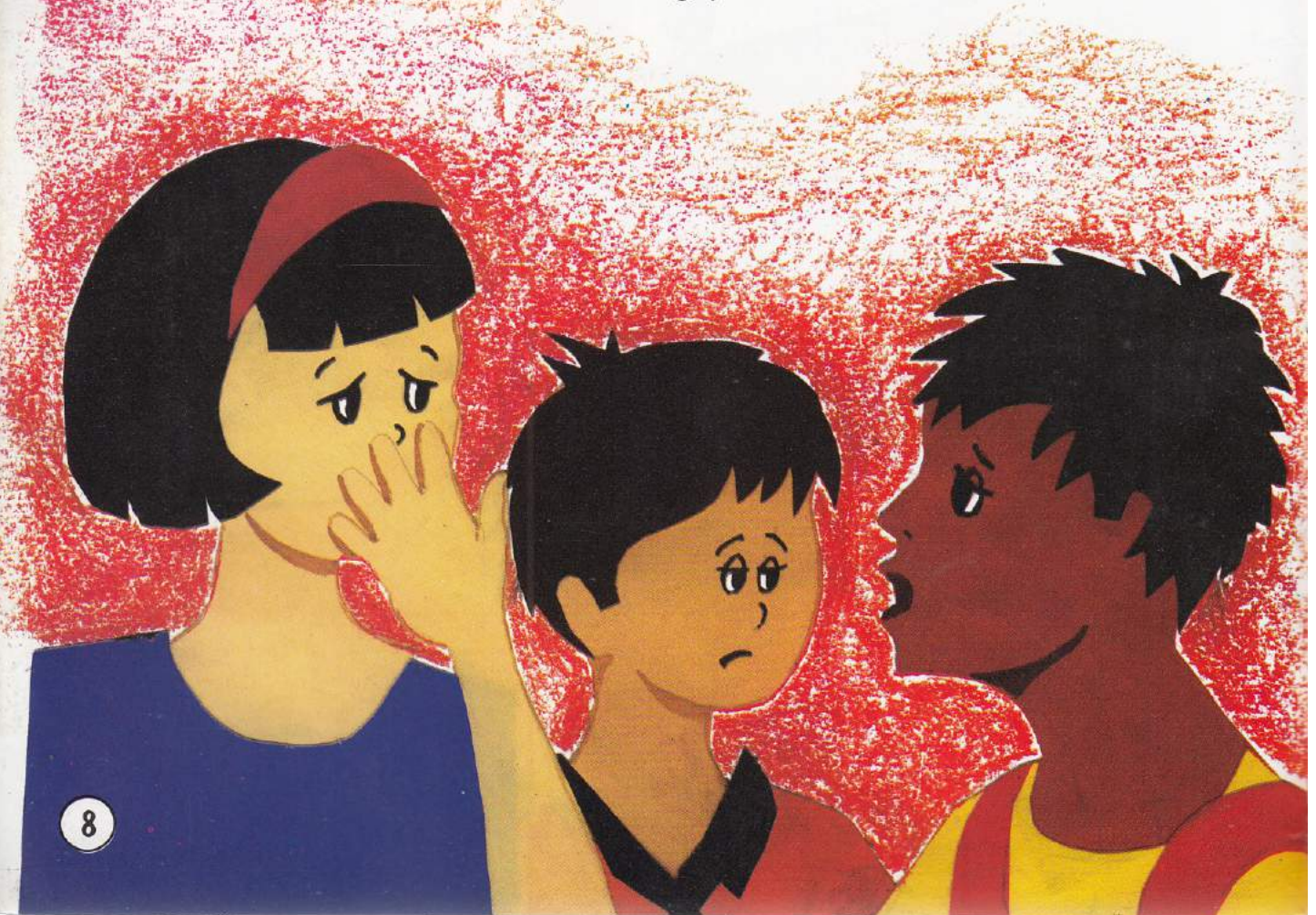


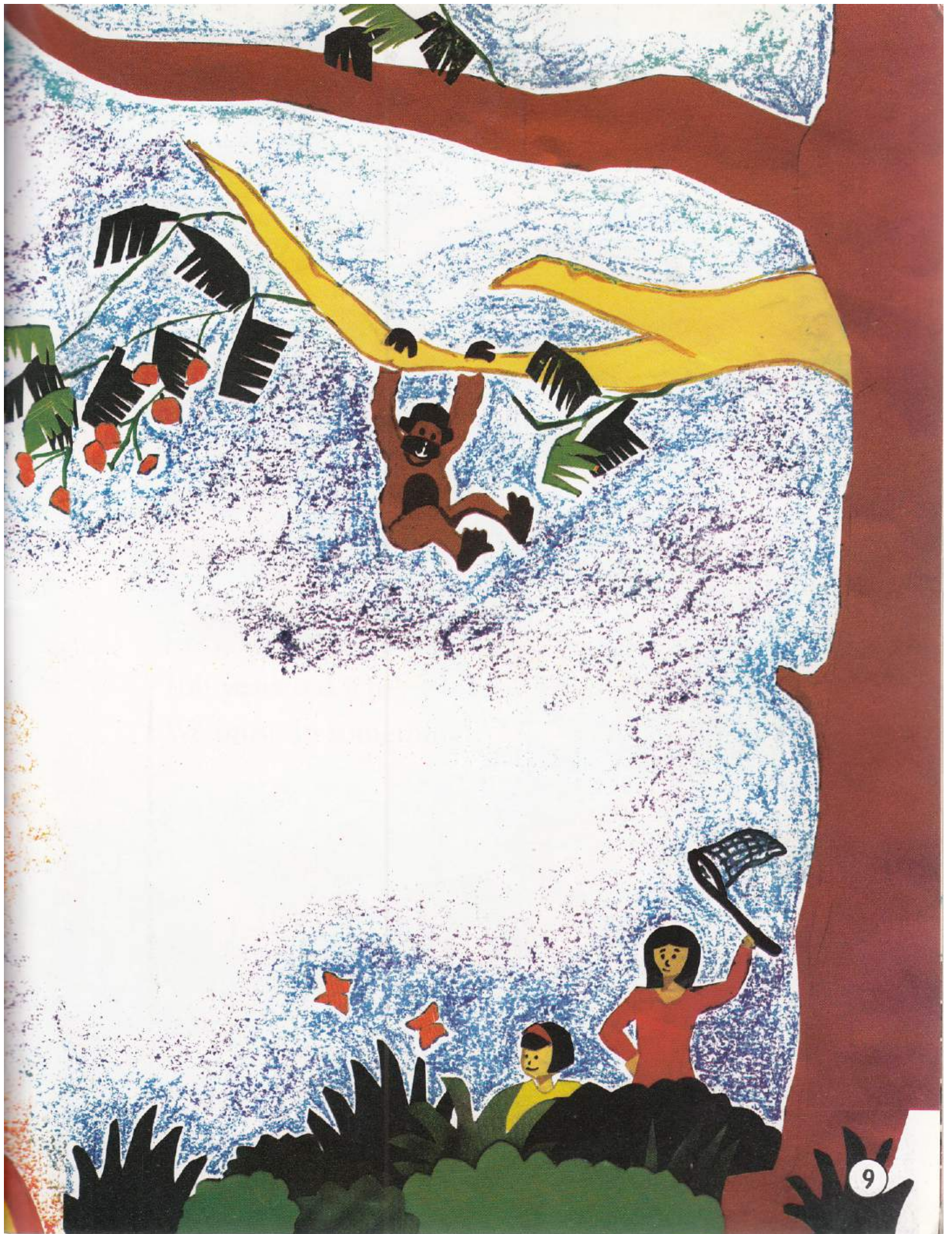
A tapping sound broke Zara's thoughts. Khatkhat, the resident hoopoe, was tapping to say hello! Suddenly, Arnab burst in, saying, "I have some bad news!" Zara could see Simran, Yusuf and Aman sauntering along in the distance. "Hurry up, you three! Something's happened," she called out loudly. The three ran furiously and climbed up panting. Simran asked, "What's the matter?" Arnab said importantly, "I think we will soon have no tree house." This was stunning news! "Why do you say that?" asked Yusuf angrily. "On my way here," said Arnab, "I heard Mr Eitwala, the contractor, talking to another man about building an apartment block here!"






Yusuf, Aman, Zara and Simran shrieked, “Apartments, here? Are you sure?” Arnab said, “Very sure. They were looking straight here and Mr Eitwala was pointing his hand at this space!” Zara was visibly upset. She and her mother had spent many afternoons chasing butterflies in the abandoned compound. You see Zara’s mother was a lepidopterist—a person who studies butterflies. “What about the parrots that live in this tree? What about Khatkhat? What about the monkeys who visit sometimes? Where will they go?” asked Simran, very worried. “I don’t know,” said Arnab, “I’m only telling you what I heard...”









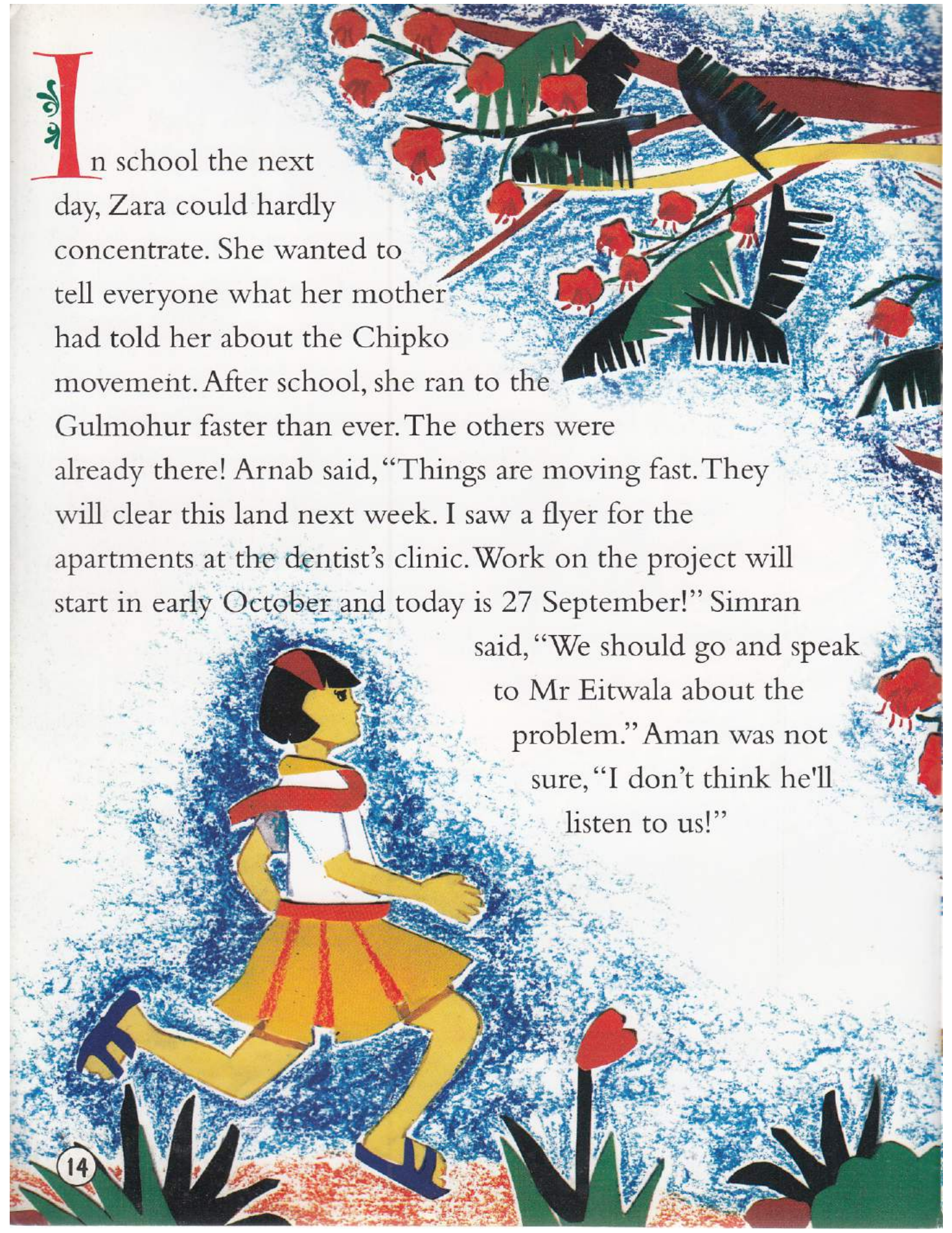
A troubled silence descended on the tree house. The Gulmohur tree had always, always been around. The children played under it, behind it... collecting its gorgeous orange flowers to make cards and Holi colours... Till some years ago, the washerman would iron clothes under it. "There's nothing we can do, I suppose," said Aman, breaking the silence. "We'll have to find another tree to build a new tree house." Zara said seriously, "It's not just about the tree house, Aman! Imagine cutting down this lovely tree. It must be 100 years old. They can't cut it to build apartments! We must do something!"





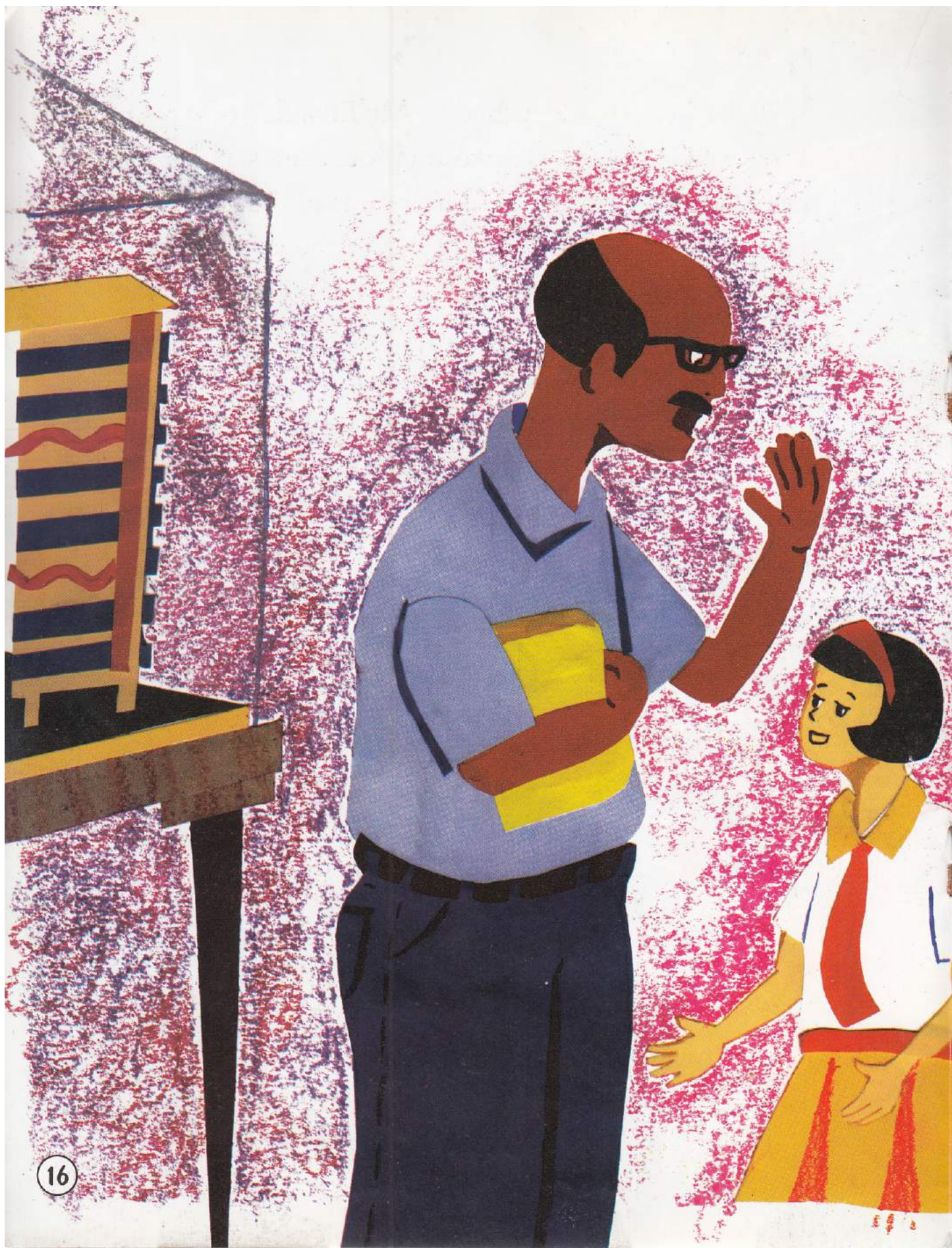
But what could the five friends do? They thought hard for an hour but there were no bright ideas. "Let's sleep on it and meet tomorrow," said Zara. "There must be some rules about cutting trees... My mother once told me that some women prevented contractors from cutting down trees, up in the Himalayas, by simply hugging them. Maybe we can do that." Simran agreed, "That's easy. We can also do that!" Yusuf said, "Yes, but what if they come to chop it down when we are at school? We must find out how serious the apartment plan is." Arnab volunteered to find out how soon the flats were to be built.



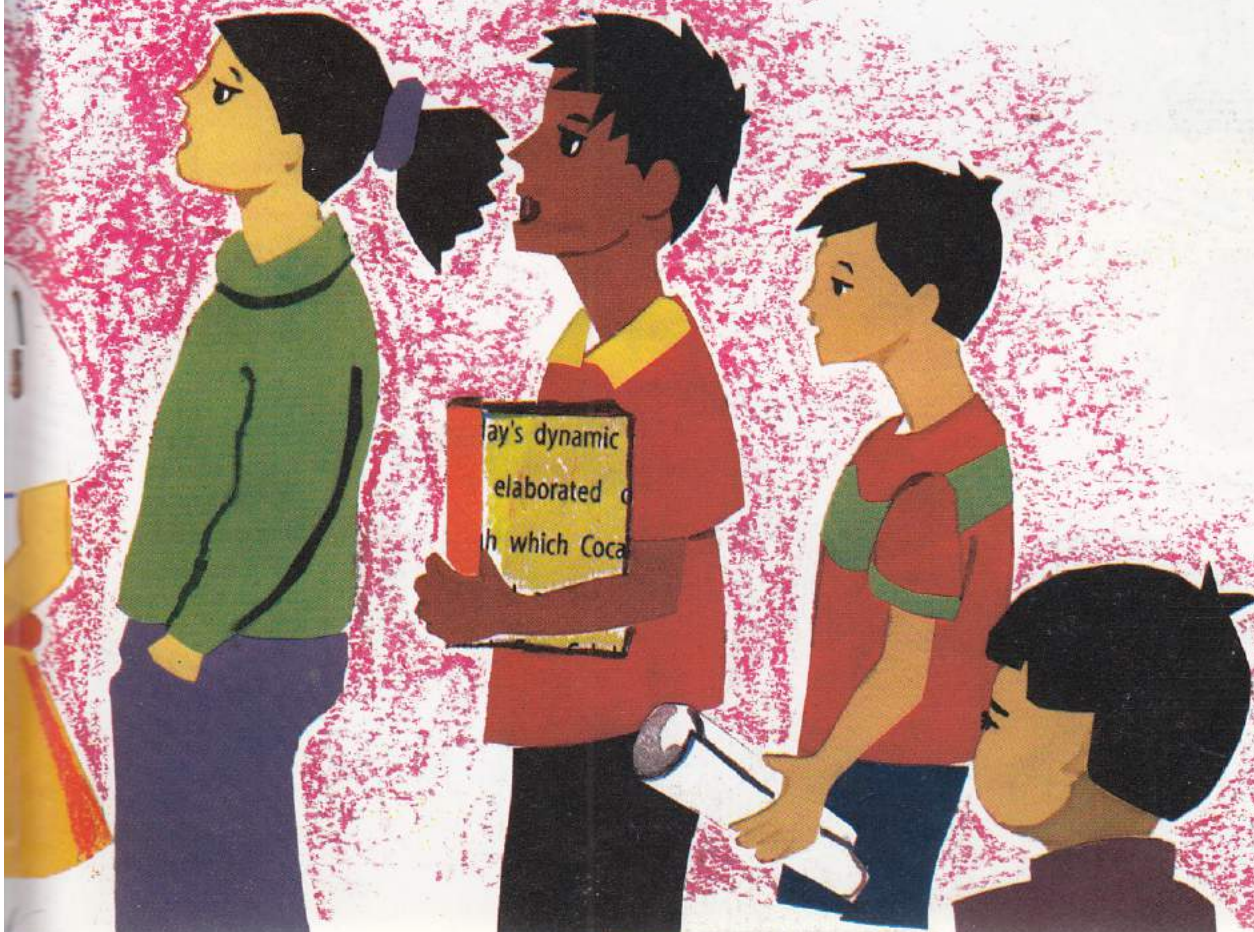


In school the next day, Zara could hardly concentrate. She wanted to tell everyone what her mother had told her about the Chipko movement. After school, she ran to the Gulmohur faster than ever. The others were already there! Arnab said, "Things are moving fast. They will clear this land next week. I saw a flyer for the apartments at the dentist's clinic. Work on the project will start in early October and today is 27 September!" Simran said, "We should go and speak to Mr Eitwala about the problem." Aman was not sure, "I don't think he'll listen to us!"





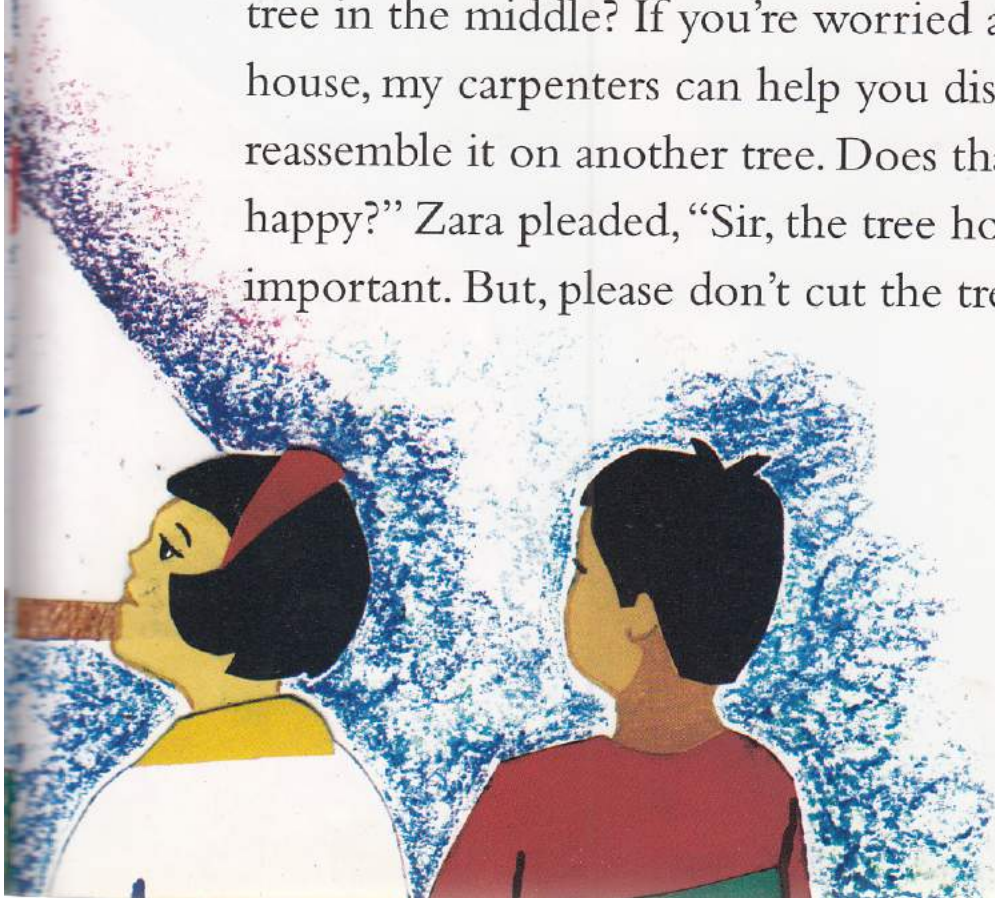
The five friends rushed to Mr Eitwala's office. On the way, explaining the Chipko method, Zara said, "If we can't persuade Mr Eitwala, we'll have to take the Chipko route!" In the office was a model of the apartment block in a big glass case. It was called 'Golden Green Apartments'. It had no Gulmohur tree! An oldish gentleman, who looked like assistant, secretary and peon rolled into one, asked them why they wanted to meet Mr Eitwala. Without batting an eyelid, Arnab said, "We want to interview him for our school magazine." The man thought that was a good reason and allowed them in.

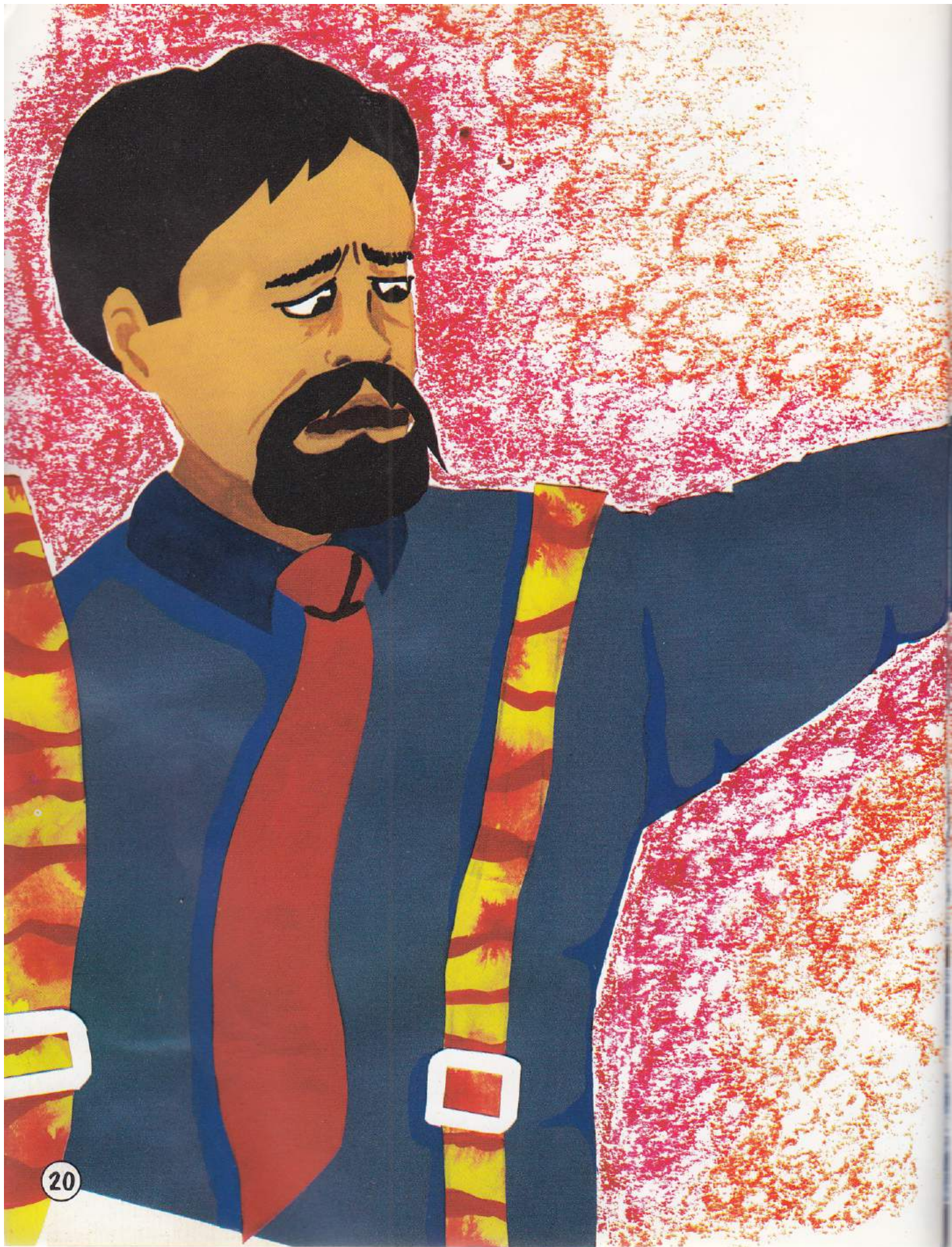




Mr Eitwala was sitting behind a glass table, looking very important. "Hello, young man," he said to Arnab, in a friendly way. "What can I do for you?" Zara said, "Sir, it's about the apartments you are building..." Mr Eitwala was pleased. "How well informed young people are these days! Yes, it will be world-class, like apartments in Paris and New York." Arnab said, "Actually we want to talk to you about the tree." Surprised, Mr Eitwala said, "Tree, what tree?" Zara continued, "The old Gulmohur tree. Will you cut it down?"

"Naturally yes! How can we build apartments with a tree in the middle? If you're worried about your tree house, my carpenters can help you dismantle it and reassemble it on another tree. Does that make you happy?" Zara pleaded, "Sir, the tree house is not so important. But, please don't cut the tree!"





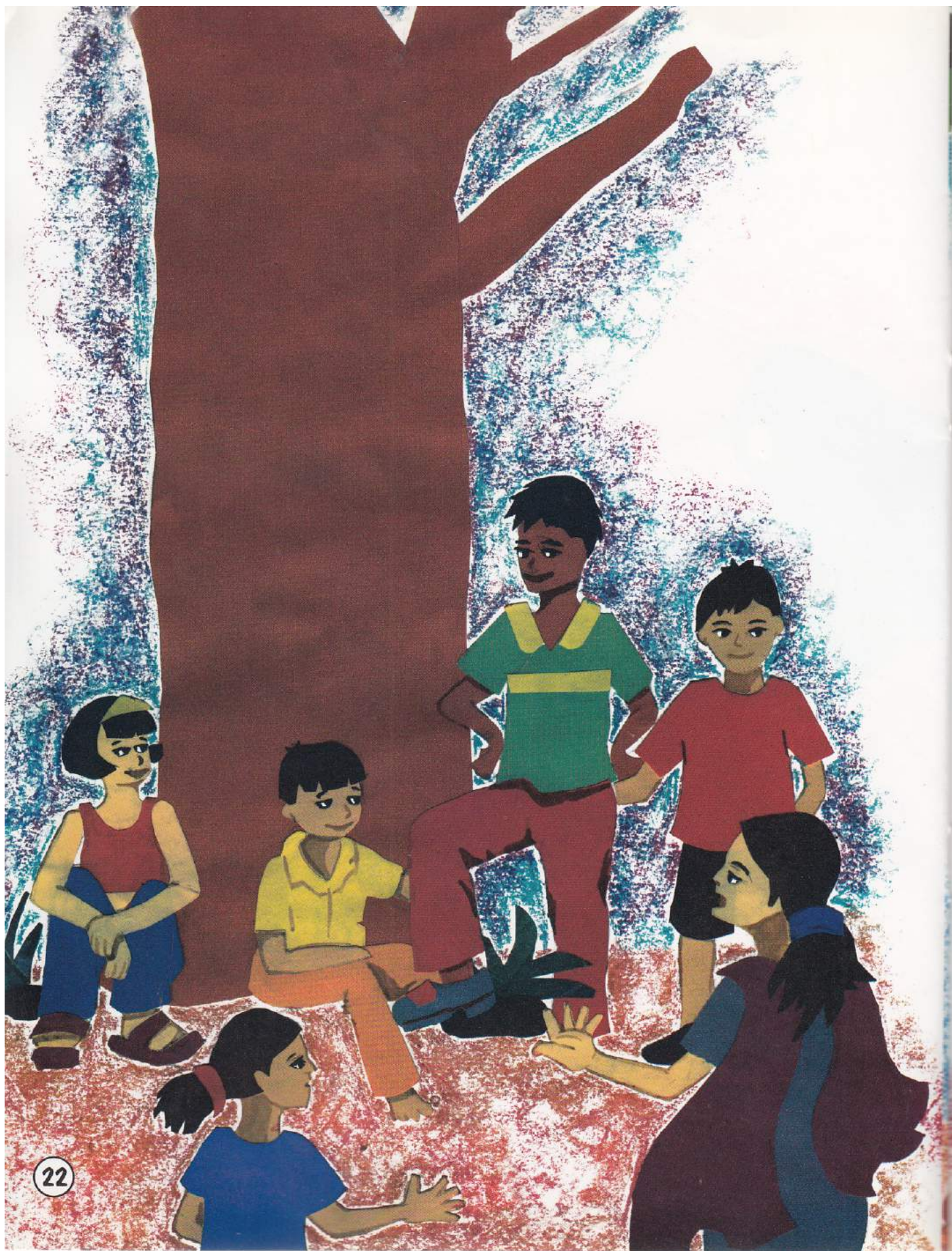


Shaking with anger, Mr Eitwala said, "What? Are you joking? Your request is preposterous! It is unreasonable! Cheek huh, telling me what to do and what not to do. Don't meddle

in my business. The tree will be gone by tomorrow afternoon and you won't miss it once my apartment block is up. It will have fancy swings and slides for you, all imported from Singapore. Now off you go! I have work to do."

The children left with long faces. They went right back to the tree house. Things were happening too fast. The tree was to be cut down the next day! They had to do something but there was hardly any time!



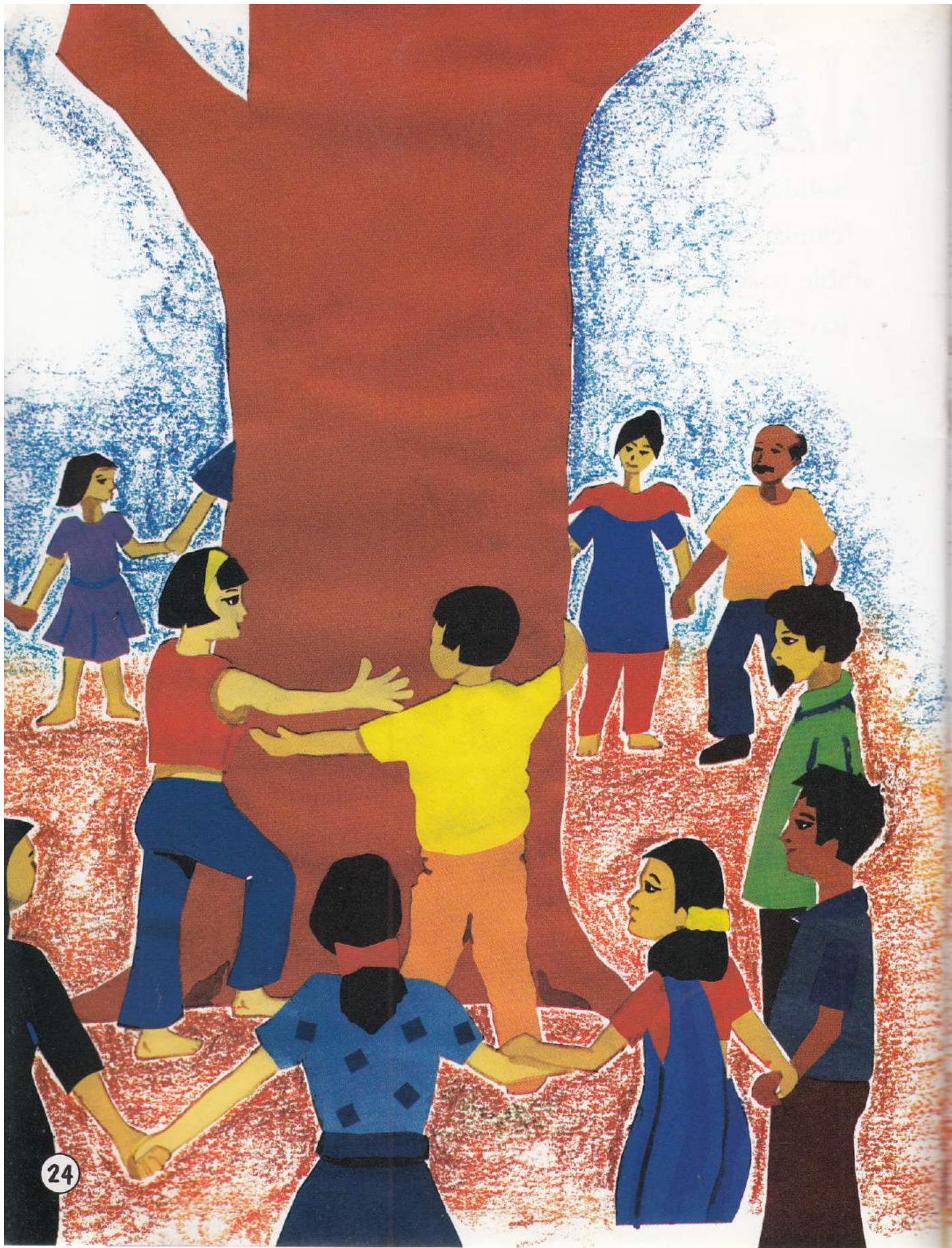


Luckily, the next day was Saturday, a school holiday. The strategy was decided. They would all ‘chipko’ (stick) to the tree. Mr Eitwala would not be able to axe the tree without harming them and would have to give up. But it was risky!

Early next morning, the five friends met under the Gulmohur and waited for the cutters. Soon it was time for breakfast but they refused to leave the tree. Zara’s mother came to check on them. When she found out what the children were doing, she decided to join them. Soon other parents and friends also came, with food and drink.

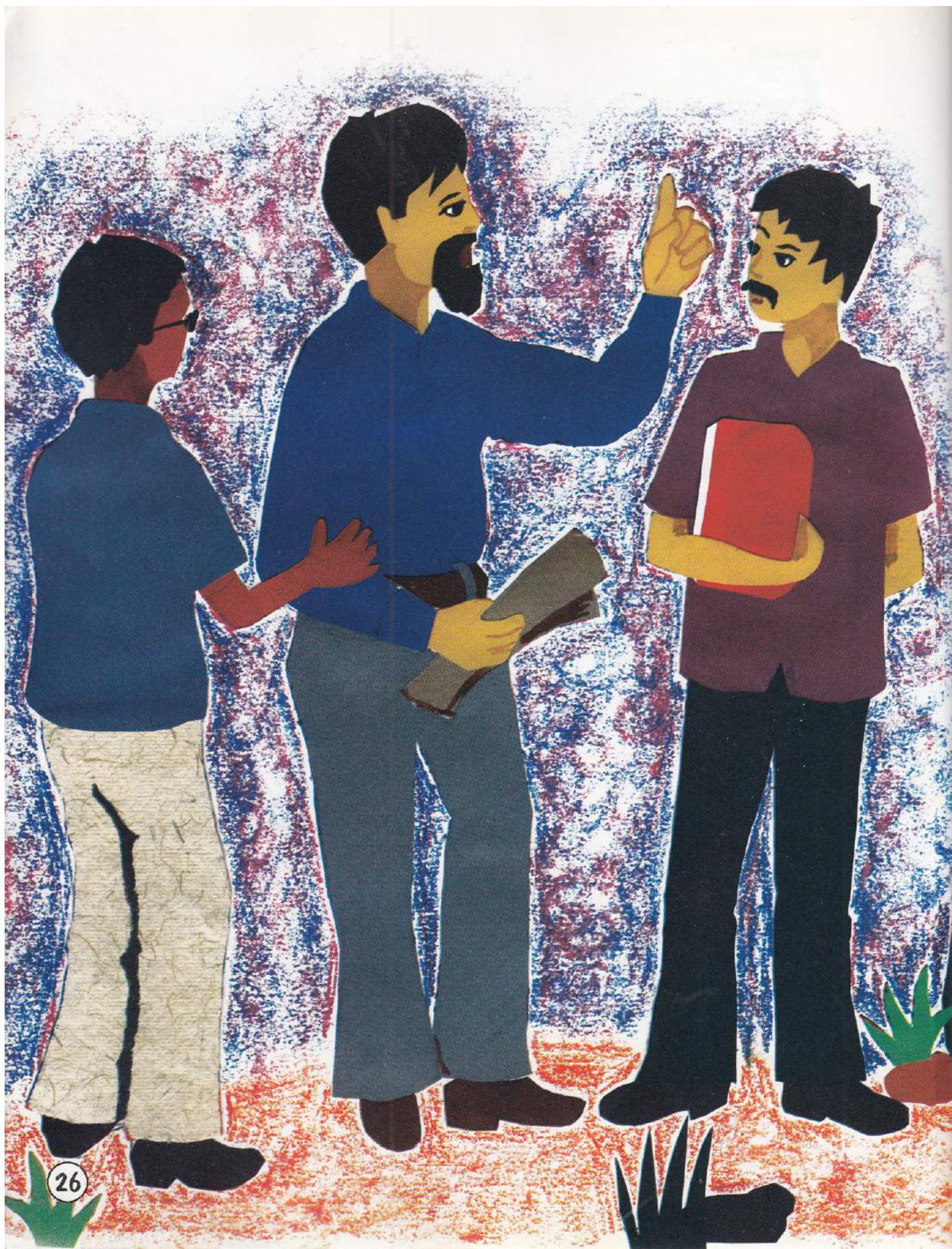
By noon, the place was looking rather like a picnic spot!





The children could hardly eat. They had butterflies in their stomachs. Would they be able to pull it off? They need not have worried. By late afternoon, more than 100 people had collected there. The children formed a ring around the tree and around them was another circle, after that another. There were at least 10 circles of people around the tree! When the cutters came in the evening, they were astounded. They didn't know what to do. Without saying a word, they left. In a little while, Mr Eitwala and his team arrived. The children shouted, "Save the Gulmohur! Nothing less, nothing more!" A huge cry rent the air, "Save the Gulmohur! The Gulmohur must stay!"





W

hen Mr Eitwala saw the huge crowd around the Gulmohur tree, he went into a huddle with his associates. They took a quick decision. "The Gulmohur tree will stay," announced Mr Eitwala. "We will redesign the apartments so that they are built around the tree. And the apartment block will now be called Gulmohur Apartments." Everyone cheered enthusiastically, "Yeah! Yeah!" The children could not believe their ears. It had not been so difficult after all. They were thrilled that they had succeeded in saving the beautiful Gulmohur tree. (The tree house would probably have to go, though.)

Yeah! Yeah!



By the next morning, the five children had become local celebrities. The newspapers were full of news about how the children had saved the old Gulmohur tree. Zara, Arnab, Simran, Yusuf and Aman were overjoyed... they were on television! They rushed to the tree house for another meeting. After all, they had to prepare some intelligent answers for their live interview on the local cable channel! And their parents, friends, teachers, neighbours... all would then have to 'chipko' to the television!





The *fiery* Gulmohur

The Gulmohur is a spectacular tree. Native to Madagascar and the islands of Mauritius, it is now common across the world, especially Asia. With its umbrella-shaped canopy, the Gulmohur is a great shade-giver and is therefore planted along roadsides. Though almost bare in the winter, the Gulmohur bursts into glorious blooms of bright orange and vivid scarlet as soon as April comes. In May, the tree is at its loveliest. The contrast of its sober green compound leaves and fiery orange flowers is a feast for the eyes in the summer heat! This is why it is a popular ornamental tree in gardens. In some rural areas, its woody pods are used as fuel, while its wood is used to make toys and ornaments. Some people use its flowers and buds as food flavouring! Some other names for the Gulmohur are Royal Peacock Flower, Pentecost Tree, Holy Ghost Tree and Krishan sera. Its botanical name is *Delonix regia*.



Colours of celebration

Holi is the Indian festival of colours. People sprinkle, smear, splash coloured powder and water on each other to celebrate Holi. In old days, people made colours from flowers and herbs. Not only were these more vibrant and fragrant but also healthier than the synthetic colours used now. Some even played Holi with real petals and leaves! Gulmohur flowers were used to make orange colour while its leaves yielded green. Slowly, these natural colours were replaced by synthetic ones, which can damage our skin, cause allergies and even result in blindness!



It may be wise to turn back the clock and use natural colours again. Why don't you try making some yourself? Making colours is quite simple and a lot of fun! Here's how to get orange...

- ✿ Dry some Gulmohur flowers and tuberose (for fragrance) in the shade for some days.
- ✿ When dry and brittle, crush or grind them into a fine powder.
- ✿ Add a little turmeric powder, gram flour, rice flour or even talc for a powdery consistency.
- ✿ Use either as a powder or add some water to make wet colour.
- ✿ For wet colour, you can also boil Gulmohur flowers in water and leave overnight. Dilute before using.



Pink onion
Beetroot



Blue hibiscus
Indigo berry
Jacaranda



Henna
Mint



Marigold
Turmeric
Yellow
chrysanthemum



Hibiscus
Red sandalwood
Pomegranate
peel



Magenta

Blue

Green

Yellow

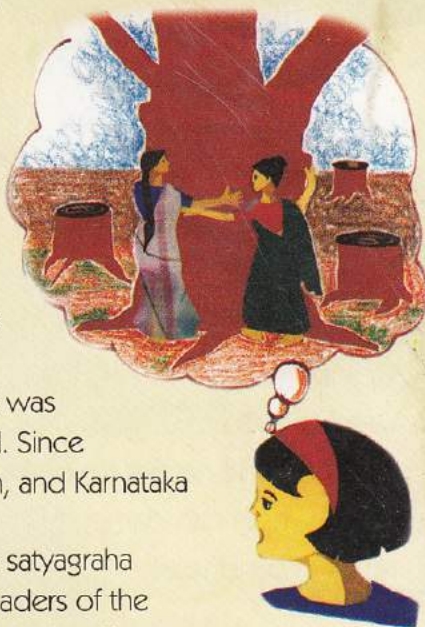
Red



The courage of the Chipko activists

Remember how Zara is inspired by the Chipko Movement? If you know Hindi, you will know that 'chipko' literally means 'to stick'. The Chipko Movement refers to the way local people, mostly women, saved trees in the Himalayas. The first such effort was a spontaneous one in 1973, when Uttaranchal's (then Uttar Pradesh, a state in northern India) forests were being destroyed at an alarming rate. Realizing the close connection between forests, water, climate and food, the local women led by Bachni Devi prevented tree felling by hugging the trees and not budging even when the cutters came with their saws and axes! The women were so brave and so determined to save their trees that the contractors were forced to leave. The Chipko Movement was very successful and, in 1980, tree felling in Uttaranchal hills was banned. Since then, the movement has spread to the states of Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, and Karnataka as well as pockets in the Western Ghats.

The Chipko Movement is a living example of Mahatma Gandhi's satyagraha strategy. Sunder Lal Bahugana and Chandi Prasad Bhatt are prominent leaders of the movement. Bahugana says that modern environmental problems can be solved by re-establishing harmony between man and nature. Real development is synonymous with culture. When we interact with nature in a way that we achieve peace, happiness, prosperity and fulfilment and satisfy our basic needs, "we march towards culture".



TREE of words

Some common words contain all the letters of the word TREE: T, R, E and E. Here are clues for seven such words that contain these four letters, but not necessarily in that order! Can you guess these words? The number of dashes will help you!

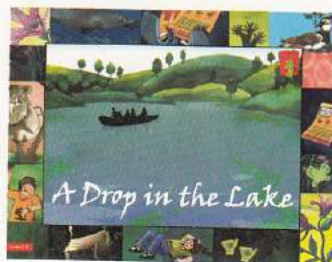
- 1 Study of angles and shapes
- 2 To welcome, or say hullo
- 3 Another word for road
- 4 Beautiful long hair
- 5 Between 13 and 19 years
- 6 Someone who lives in a place
- 7 One who provides food for a party

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____
- 7 _____

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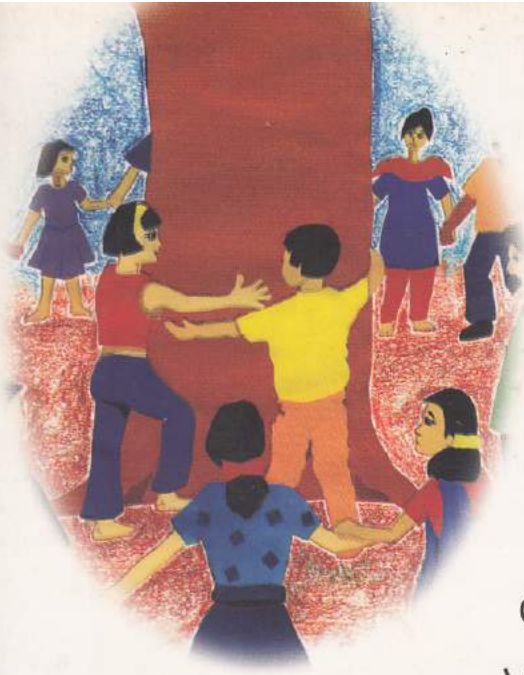
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Level 2 books are developed for children aged 8 to 11 years, keeping in mind their awareness, curiosity, and vocabulary levels.
Parents can encourage the children to read on their own, and enjoy the interplay of text and images.



Zara and her friends love their treehouse up in the old Gulmohur tree. It's where they play, study, share secrets, dream... When they find out that the tree was to be cut down to make space for apartments, they gather all their strength and plan a strategy to save both the tree and the treehouse. Can they pull it off? Read on...

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